

Michael Peachin (Hg.), *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*, Oxford – New York (Oxford University Press) 2011 (Oxford Handbooks in Classics and Ancient History) XVI, 738 S., zahlr. Abb., ISBN 978-0-19-518800-4 (geb.) \$ 150,–

The last few years have seen the publication of quite a number of companions and handbooks dedicated to different aspects of the classical world, in which the contributions of various specialists in different fields are combined to give an overview of recent scholarly developments. The book under review, „The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World“, is part of this trend. It is an impressive book, which comprises 35 chapters by different authors, in which the editor, Michael Peachin from New York University, has tried to create „[...] a volume about the various ways people in the ancient Roman world related to each other. What we want to impart here is a sense of the arguably most basic or characteristic sorts of interpersonal interaction engaged by the Romans. We want something like the primary colors, from which all the other shades of Roman social relations were mixed [...]“ (13).

The focus on Roman relations in general is an interesting one, one that has the benefit that the scope of this volume could go beyond, for example, family relationships, one of the subjects of Rawson's recent companion (B. Rawson [ed.], *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, Oxford 2011). However, this focus also creates a problem for the editor, because, how should one define this „most basic or characteristic sort of interpersonal interaction engaged by the Romans“? In his „Introduction“, Peachin goes to great lengths to explain what, in his view, was typically Roman in Roman social relationships (3–36). Based on earlier scholarship, he comes to the conclusion that three elements are central to Roman social relations: every aspect of life was somehow social for a Roman, the Romans had a strong impulse to structure their society fastidiously, and the social structures thus created tended towards a notably rigid formalization. It is exactly this „striking predilection for establishing acute social hierarchies“ that Peachin considers essentially Roman. According to him, all social interactions „served ultimately to position one in a hierarchy with respect to one's interlocutor“ (21–22). This ubiquitous taste for ranking people was most strongly visible in the behaviour of people within the highly competitive elite circles, Peachin argues, but it seems to hold true for all layers of Roman society, because there is no evidence for any significant displeasure with the existing social order. Moreover, the masses copied elite attitudes and elite social structures in non-elite organizations, which seems to point to an internalization of societal forms. This brings Peachin to the conclusion that „to be socially a Roman, and to relate to others in the Roman social fashion, should have

involved most essentially a perpetual attempt to establish, as it were, one's social *auctoritas* (influence, authority, prestige, ascendancy, esteem); and for doing that there were particular mechanisms, which could ultimately be comprehended as Roman" (27).

These „particular mechanisms“ to establish one's position in the Roman social order are to a large extent explored in this handbook, which approaches the subject of Roman social relations from a number of different angles. After a first part which includes „Prefatory Material“ – Peachin's introduction and a chronological overview of the social changes from Republic to Principate written by Clifford Ando – six other parts follow which highlight different aspects of social relationships. The second part, „Mechanisms of Socialization“, focuses on the ways young Romans were taught to behave as Romans. The five chapters of this part delve into the upbringing of Romans within the family (Osgood), primary education (Horster), rhetorical education (Connolly), training in philosophy (Hahn) and the effects of law on social formation (Kehoe). The third part, „Mechanisms of Communication and Interaction“ is about the way messages could be communicated through literature (Hedrick), epigraphy (Meyer), tablets and papyri (Jördens), and coins (Noreña). The fourth part, „Communal Contexts for Social Interaction“, explores not only the way the social hierarchy within the gentry was established, by looking at the effects of elite self-representation (Flower), public speaking (Pina Polo) and the Second Sophistic (Schmitz), but also social interactions in which, in principle, all members of society could participate – in court (Bablit), during public entertainments (Colemann) and in the public baths of Roman cities (Fagan). The fifth part of this volume, „Modes of Interpersonal Relations“, discusses Roman honour (Lendon), friendship (Verboven) and hospitality (Nicols), along with Roman dining habits (Dunbabin and Slater) and violence in Roman social relationships (Fagan again). The last two parts are somewhat different from the others parts, insomuch that they do not focus on social relationships within the mainstream of Roman society, but on groups with a characteristic different position within society. In part six the contributors look at „Societies within the Roman Community“ which could offer an alternative route to social standing, such as *collegia* (Perry), the Roman army (Potter), Graeco-Roman cultic societies (Scheid), and the Jewish (Schwartz) and Christian (Becker) communities. The last part is on „Marginalized Persons“ with chapters on slaves (Schumacher), women (Milnor), children (Krause), prostitutes (McGinn), entertainers (Leppin), magicians and astrologers (Rives), bandits (Riess) and physically deformed and disabled people (Stahl).

The list of contributors is an impressive overview of specialist in their fields, both from the United States and continental Europe. It is notable that no English scholars contributed to this volume, while a quarter of the chapters were

written by German scholars. Certainly a compliment to the quality of German scholarship on Roman social history. It is a compliment to the editor that he not only attracted such a group of contributors, but has also managed to combine their contributions into a unified whole, in terms of both length and focus. Considering the large number of contributors, this book is very well structured and organized. The chapters are well thought out and are often thought-provoking. For example, Charles Hedrick's chapter on literature and communication illuminates, in a striking way, the different nature of literature in Roman compared to modern society (167–190). He argues convincingly that difference in book production – hand-written vs. printed texts – led to a different type of circulation of literature in the Roman world, wherein the distribution of literary texts was first and foremost a way of strengthening the bonds of friendship within elite circles. The point can be appreciated even if one does not accept Hedrick's dismissal of non-elite Roman readers of literature as parvenus filled with feelings of longing and envy – Dickensian waifs standing with their noses smudging the windows of the candy store of literature (187). As this last example shows, it is almost impossible to look at Roman society without taking the viewpoint of the (senatorial) elite, a problem Peachin is acutely aware of (14–15). It is all too easy to ignore the rest of Roman society or to look upon the non-elite Romans with disdain. Therefore, I am particularly pleased with the parts on alternative societies within the Roman community and marginalized persons. In my opinion these chapters are the most interesting ones of the volume. Profiting from a blooming research on marginalized groups within Roman society, they give us glimpses of the ways Romans defined their position in society by excluding others, or by constructing alternative social environments.

Does „The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World“ live up to its expectations? Does it impart us with a sense of the most basic or characteristic sorts of interpersonal interaction engaged by the Romans? To a large extent it does, although there are some remarkable omissions. The most relevant of which, in my view, is the lack of a chapter on patronage. To be sure, patronage is mentioned in a number of chapters, but something so characteristic to Roman interpersonal interaction would justify its own chapter. Another point of critique on this volume is probably that there is simply too little of it. One volume, expansive as it already is, cannot include all relevant subjects on such a broad theme as Roman social relationships. A second volume could easily have been filled with the same number of similarly interesting papers, on topics like patronage, sexual relations, freedmen or Roman merchants. And that is not even taking into account the relationship between Romans and the many different cultures within their vast empire. In my opinion, this is a missed opportunity. A subject like social relations would have justified a small series of

books, with the added benefit that each volume would have been more manageable than this one.

A different problem is the lack of an adequate index for this volume. An index of four meagre pages is simply too small for a 700 page volume such as this, and the in-text cross references do not make up for this. This is a serious shortcoming, because it makes the book less useful as a work of reference to the interested scholar, who must be regarded as the main target audience for this book.

„The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World“ is definitely not a book for undergraduate students, nor is it a book for the general public. An interested scholar, however, will find much of interest in this volume which gives a good overview of the state of research on social relations within Roman society.

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